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MAY 8 1981

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WALES

## Progress of the principality

By Stephen Koss

KENNETH O. MORGAN:

Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980  
463pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press/University of Wales Press. £15.  
0 19 821736 6

Long ago, when Cunard's transatlantic service and the Hays-Fulbright scholarship programme were both running full steam, I disembarked at Southampton on my first visit to the United Kingdom. On the boat-train into Waterloo Station, I shared a compartment with an energetic tourist from the American Midwest, a camera strapped to his shoulder, and the plaid on his trousers even louder than his voice. He summoned the ticket collector, from whom he solicited travel advice: "Tell me, how do I get to Wales?" His purpose, he ingeniously revealed, was to set foot in ten European countries instead of the nine on his prepared itinerary. The destination in Wales hardly mattered, so long as he could "chalk it up".

The ticket collector, whose reply seemed painfully well rehearsed, explained the problems of making railway connections in those post-Beeching days. To cross the frontier, as it were, was not as easy as it looked on the map. Without going so far as to dismiss the principality as "a geographical expression", as a late Victorian Bishop had done, he counselled my uncomprehending compatriot that one would be hard put to say precisely where Wales began and England left off. Nor was there any point along the line at which Wales could be expected to manifest its Welshness: further informed that his passport would bear no mark of his achievement, the passenger completely lost interest. Perhaps Andorra or San Marino better satisfied his ambition.

This episode came to mind in reading Kenneth O. Morgan's magnificent contribution to a projected new series on the history of Wales, under the general editorship of Glynor Williams. Spanning the century since 1880, it evocatively chronicles "the rebirth of a nation", and implicitly poses a challenge to collaborators in the series,

especially those who will deal with periods in the quiescent stretch between Glendower's Rebellion and the later Welsh renaissance. Not only will they be obliged to measure up to the exceptionally high literary standard that Morgan has set, but they will also have to address themselves to the concepts of political and cultural ethnicity that he has firmly established.

To his credit, the author readily acknowledges and illuminates the contradictions of the modern Welsh experience. Wales has survived, artificially in some respects, as an entity; but its administrative cohesion has tended to be more apparent than real, while its intellectual integrity has often proved more real than apparent. To define the boundaries of Wales, much less the metaphysical and sometimes metaphorical contours of Welshness, has defied the wits of politicians, poets, and ticket collectors alike. Not a few historians have been defeated in the attempt. A Welsh background can prove either a help or a hindrance. A sympathy for Welsh national aspirations, not confined to native sons and daughters, can add to the perplexity.

Adjoined to a larger and usually more prosperous state, with which it has steadfastly resisted full integration, Wales has none the less suffered - or enjoyed - sufficient absorption so as to blur its edges. Although a redoubtable Welsh spirit has kept alive, it has occasionally flourished most markedly among exiles in London, Liverpool and

overseas. *Cymru Fydd*, the movement for Welsh Home Rule in the 1880s, drew a powerful stimulus from the Welsh-language chapels in the metropolis. From a middle-class London base, the Cymmrodorion Society launched its campaign for a national university in Wales. In the 1930s, Welsh literateurs gathered to confirm their national identity at "Griff's" bookshop, off the Charing Cross Road. Expatriates, few of them *émigrés* in the customary sense, thus played a vital part in ensuring the survival of a Welsh tradition. But their effect, like their varying perceptions of the Welsh dilemma, was restricted by factors of proximity, Anglo-Welsh consanguinity, linguistic fluency, and, not least, constitutionalism.

Who have been the standard-bearers of a uniquely Welsh consciousness? The question admits to no easy answers, and Morgan is far too sophisticated to hazard any. Lord Penrhyn could trace his ancestry to "the age of the princes hundreds of years earlier", but his indifference to the plight of his quarrymen put him among the Anglo-Saxon oppressors. Sir Alfred Mond, the son of a German Jew, was mocked for his guttural accent ("Vales for the Vels"); but he was an enlightened employer at his Clydach nickel works, and displayed sympathy for Welsh causes as Liberal MP for Swansea and, later, Carmarthen. Basil Tickell Jones, appointed to a Welsh bishopric, carried along his English prejudices. Con-

versely, the Reverends J.D. Jones and Hugh Price Hughes remained deeply imbued with Welsh communal values, though they preached from English pulpits.

In politics, there have been still greater complexities, owing in part to the vagaries of parliamentary representation. Conspicuous among Victorian Liberals who sat for Welsh constituencies were Henry Richard, whose Welsh connections were surely less binding than was his Manchester pacifism, and Stuart Rendel, "an Englishman, an Anglican, even... an arms manufacturer"; both actively embraced Welsh causes, and Rendel successfully challenged the entrenched authority of the Wynne of Wyanstey. Gladstone, "the squire of Hawarden", boasted a wife who was half Welsh; presumably, however, he had better reasons for extending legislative recognition to Welsh selfhood.

In 1881, at Gladstone's behest, the 1st Baron Aberdare (formerly H. A. Bruce, MP for Merthyr) proposed and headed a landmark inquiry into Welsh higher education. Elsewhere (*Wales in British Politics*, 1963; 3rd edition 1978), Morgan has tagged him as a "Churchman, an Englishman, and an employer with a dubious record in (Welsh) industrial disputes". Does Aberdare, by virtue of the title he affixed to himself, qualify as more of a Welshman than the selfsame Bruce? Similarly, was Edward VIII more moved by Welsh distress during the

Depression by having been invested as Prince of Wales? Prince Charles, who went through the same ceremony in 1969, under the theatrical direction of Lord Snowdon (aptly named), acquired a smattering of Welsh phrases from a summer's cramming at Aberystwyth. It remains open to question how deep his Welshness goes.

Labour politicians, whose electoral ascendancy supplanted that of the Liberals in due course, personified the same inconsistencies. Fennor Brockway was less a Welshman, but arguably more a "Welsh" member than Reginald McKenna had been. Indeed, the most determinedly "Welsh" Labour spokesman, in terms of popularity and commitment, have often been carpetbaggers from elsewhere on the Celtic fringe. Keir Hardie might have disclaimed "the little Bethel mentality of Wales for the Welsh", but he dutifully learned to sing the Welsh anthem, and defended the Welsh miners as kinsmen. Ramsay MacDonald, too, was studiously attentive to Welsh industrial grievances.

His pedigree notwithstanding, it would be difficult to say the same of J.H. Thomas. That Aneurin Bevan was "a distinguished son of the valleys" did not prevent him from scorning "the very idea that there were distinct social and economic problems peculiar to Wales and separable from those of Britain generally". Michael Foot, a West Countryman by birth and a Londoner by residence, "was in time to prove far more sympathetic to Welsh national aspirations than his mentor from Tredegar had ever been". James Griffiths, fittingly appointed the first Secretary of State for Wales in 1964, was unimpeachably Welsh in every respect. But what does one make of other "Welsh" MPs: Peter Thomas, Griffiths's Tory successor, who inconveniently sat for Hendon South; Leo Abse, who opposed devolution, and James Callaghan, who supported it; or Roy Jenkins, "originating from Aberystwyth before translation to Balliol"? In the crowded cultural sphere, where some of the best friends of the Welsh revival have been Englishmen, distinctions are especially difficult to draw. How essential was Welsh lineage, with or without a command of the Welsh language, to the inculcation of Welsh enthusiasms? "I have never

## Sons and Lovers: Part One

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the drinking men that drive a wife to nag,  
the cool scuttles, the kids, the kitchen sink,  
the pregnancies that make her belly sag,  
the little houses packed in, back to back,  
like the poor sleeping husband and poor wife—  
for those with work, a smoking chimney stack,  
others stay cold, an unwelcoming life  
though neighbours with coarse kindness bring some help,  
it's still an animal thing, like dog and bitch,  
fawn to the masters, snarl, snarl and whelp,  
make do and mend, clean, cook, and knit or stitch—  
till Saturday's beer breaks in, hot cock and hen,  
the night that starts the cycle going again.

Gavin Ewart

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## Halfway houses

By Carol Rumens

LORNA TRACY:  
Amateur Passions  
202pp. Virago Press. £7.95.  
(Paperback £3.50)  
0 86068 198 X

There is something about the scale on which most of these short stories are constructed which suggests that their author might be more at home in a more spacious prose form. An odd sense that some of them perhaps began life as chapters of a novel is induced largely, I think, by Tracy's tendency to divert her narrative into leisurely pages of case history when a particular character takes her fancy. In "The Spoilers", for example, it is as though psychoanalysis had taken over from author: the early life of the Professor of Civilization and Its Discontents is relentlessly unravelled in the pursuit of reasons for his undeniable nastiness. This is a pity, for the story begins stylishly with a revealing conversation between the vain Professor and his Chinese photographer. It is as though Tracy mistrusts her writer's instinct for showing character through action and dialogue; she feels that explanations, especially about the past, are needed too.

In a more experimental kind of story, "The Terry Cloth Mother", Tracy divides her narrative into thirteen short, separately titled parts, again suggesting the desire for a broader canvas. Her technique involves the juxtaposition of scenes from the lives of different characters, an effect reminiscent of the cinematic split-screen device. The story is amusingly told, and sprays of conventional documentary linking the more emblematic sections mark the effect. Despite occasional flirtations with surrealism (the finale of "The Mama Stories", for example, includes a discussion about whether radishes and cookies suffer pain, and introduces a frock-coated man scaling a drainpipe), Tracy's narratives generally have the drab, meandering, rather arbitrary quality of the average, uneventful lives that are being

described.

This is not to say that the actual writing is humourless or unimaginative: Tracy has an affectionate and observant brand of mockery for the Mammas, the Professor Graydons and the Gail Schwartzendubers of lower middle-class America as they live out their inoffensive, WASPish lives. Frequently, however, she seems to be writing about the same character in a different setting — another reason for feeling that *Amateur Passions* is half-way to being a novel. The women are invariably disappointed by the men to whom they are misguidedly attached themselves; the men are failures too, though society convives with them in concealing it. Tracy's characters are usually unbelievers in whose lives some narrow brand of parental religion has left a residue of despair. They work in labs or libraries or hold minor academic posts. They are willing enough to go to bed with one another, but sex produces no wonderful transformations: "some of his chest hair mated with an eyebrow, began itching".

Though a quote from "The Spoilers" — "Women want love but they settle for sex" — has been selected by the publishers for what amounts to an advertising copy-line for the book-jacket, this rash generalization hardly does justice to the idealistic preoccupations of most of Tracy's cast. Several of them, one suspects, would probably settle quite happily for the company of a nice domestic animal. The first narrative concerns a girl whose pet cat is about to be taken to the vet's to be "put to sleep", and there is a powerful description of sheep waiting to be shipped for slaughter in "While Nancy Listened on the Bed". Nancy, too, has a cat who "liked to establish limits for itself, preferring a box just a bit too small for it so that it slept curled around its involuntary smile, the four paws all jumbled together with the flexible ears and the whiskers, the eyes sewn down tight as seams". This is a delicate piece of observation and incidentally suggests something of the technique lacking in the book — that of setting limits and turning them to unique advantage.

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## Past possibilities

By John Sturrock

PATRICK MODIANO:  
Une jeunesse  
193pp. Paris: Gallimard.

What did the last generation get up to when it was the present generation? That is the simple yet unsettling question out of which Patrick Modiano has now made half a dozen expert and intriguing novels. It comes up again in *Une jeunesse*. "Comme ce serait étrange", he writes, "si les enfants consentaient leurs parents tels qu'ils étaient avant leur naissance, quand ils n'étaient pas encore des parents, mais tout simplement eux-mêmes": the thought comes to Modiano on the fateful day of her thirty-fifth birthday. It is a perverse thought to have when she has just been asking herself whether, at this cardinal age, it is possible to start again in life "à zéro". The fresh start which she and her equally thirty-five-year-old husband Louis are granted by the ironic Modiano is to be rejoined by their past.

Or is it their past? It is a past certainly, "une jeunesse", but attached none too tightly to this flagrantly nondescript bourgeois couple. It could well have been the youth of other mid-life ménages than that of Louis and Odile; Louis and Odile could well have had other youths than this one. *Une jeunesse* has the trappings of naturalism with the brevity of a fable; it is a more devious story than it seems. Louis and Odile's past does not explain their present; their apparent recovery invests them merely with the pathos of a third dimension, of time. Their history has been neither as auspicious nor as honourable as one expects it to be, given the innocence and conservatism of their present circumstances, but then Modiano's way has always been to open dark doors into the past out of a sunk past.

The period of *Une jeunesse* is the early 1960s, when Louis and Odile were two impossibly vacuous young people in Paris. Separately

at first, and then as a couple, they are initiated into the grubbiness and the surrenders of life there by their elders. Louis is a just-released conscript, fresh from the barracks, with no family, no money, no known hopes—ideally *disponible*, a character in search of an author. Odile is also adrift, in absolute need of direction. Louis is patronized by the mildly fantastic Roland de Béjard, who is stylish, powerful and crooked in some large if unspecified fashion. Odile is auditioned for a record company but she has neither the voice nor the energy to succeed. She and Louis are the dumb products of the time, without the will to become its heroes.

Their coming together is a limp enough moment: they cross, they cling, they pool their passivity. In the end, though, a single act of resolution captures for them a degree of identity. They can break free of the scenes and the age of which they have hitherto been only the blankets of emanations, and of the authority of an older generation. They are free to change into the banal couple we began with, whom we would never otherwise have guessed were the result of a youth as suspiciously impotent and unsuitable as this. Because Modiano says not a word of the intervening twelve years between Louis and Odile's escape from Paris and the present moment, their ordinariness remains interrogatively at odds with the doubtful story of how it was achieved.

He is a novelist admirably gifted at reviving the period and the places he requires in a very few words. *Une jeunesse* leaves no street, or café, or cinema unnamed; the times on the juke-boxes, the cars parked outside, all are carefully stamped with the date. The evocation is rapid but pervasive, and Louis and Odile are orphans in its midst. Just like the present, the past too has a past, and there are regular, poignant moves back beyond the 1960s to wartime or pre-war France, to enigmatic moments in the stories of the characters or of Louis and Odile's now dead parents. On a trip to England, as emissaries of the dubious Béjard, they are even housed

by a Cambridge chum of the typical Guy Burgess, from whose colour view has arrived from Moscow (Modiano's geographical accuracy slips on this foreign venture when he attributes Bourgeois to Dorset instead of Hampshire—*jeunesse* in that town).

*Une jeunesse* is too spare to serve only as a reminder of the life was like for the young in Paris in those days. Modiano's prose is of the cinema: he passes his sequence to sequence without staying to analyse. What he does is equivocal. It is never certain who the characters are in the novel, or why they do what they do. Identities waver, there are enough facts to go round. Louis's first helper, the generous Brossier, has no reason that we eventually reorientates him, or by becoming an unofficial aide at the Sorbonne; the implied Béjard is quite ready to "play" his whole makeshift opera and start anew in South Africa.

New lives, or new identities, constantly beckon in Modiano's slightly ambiguous plots, which do not try too hard to be definitive: we can assume, count among his possibilities, but no more. *Une jeunesse* ends decisively because a story has to end, and can't be. Louis and Odile have all the while on the image as if it were indeed the future, beginning again of which Odile has been thinking. She and Louis are creatures of reverie, not of habits in the old days of a Paris café called "Le Réve". And the mountain resort in which they live first appeared to them in the most cheaply alluring and novel forms, as a travel poster, surely their ultimate salvation from the greyness of the city: if their past projection from the present, their present is similarly a projection from their past. It is caught between two mirrors the *jeunesse* is an exceedingly dense, well-made novel; and a despite one than the casual realism of its mood suggests.

STANLEY FISH:  
Is There a Text in This Class?  
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"Twenty years ago one of the things that literary critics didn't do was talk about the reader, at least in a way that made his experience the focus of the critical act." Stanley Fish's remark is true, as a generalization, even though it is possible to point to earlier critics who reflected upon the experience of reading; Percy Lubbock, for example, in the first paragraph of *The Craft of Fiction* (1921). Besides, Fish is an organization man, interested in the ways in which the academic profession, the conventions it adopts, the dominant forms of its exchange. Many of the things he reports are true only within the profession: they have little or no bearing upon the outside world, the market-place, or the unprofessional readers still to be found there. When he refers to criticism, he does not mean gentlemanly-critics, like Lubbock, men of letters, or novelists who also write about the novel; he rarely quotes V. S. Pritchett, Walter Benjamin, Edmund Wilson.

Is there a Text in This Class? (hereafter called *Text*) reprints twelve old essays and sets them beside four new ones. The old essays show how much Fish has done to bring about the situation in which literary critics within the profession have turned from "the poem itself" to "the reader's experience of the poem". Meetings of the Modern Language Association regularly have sessions given to reader-response, reader-orientation, and so forth. Fish has been largely, though not solely, responsible for establishing the reader's experience as a respectable question. It was assumed, for many years that if you took an interest in the reader's experience, your own especially, you would sink in "mere impressionism". Fish's essays have shown how this damnation can be avoided.

But the situation is still volatile. None of the reprinted essays is more than ten years old, but each comes with a note in which Fish confesses that he now finds its argument erroneous. He has reprinted them, presumably, for whatever historical interest they retain, or because, on the principle of *etiam peccata*, the reader's experience of a text includes the error he makes in negotiating it, a principle Fish has expounded at length. Another possibility is that he has been encouraged by J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, which begins by distinguishing between certain terms, and ends by declaring the distinctions unworkable. In any case, it is good to see

that Fish has been arguing with himself and finding himself often unconvincing; mostly, he has been arguing with other people. Indeed, it is a pity that we have to turn to the files of *Critical Inquiry* to find or recall what the precise grounds of those debates were, arguments between Fish and John Reicher, Ralph Rader, Douglas Bush, and Stephen Mailloux.

Reader-criticism, in the professional sense, started for me with Georges Poulet's essay "Phénoménologie de la conscience critique", a chapter in *La Conscience critique* (1971) which had already been published in 1969 in English translation in *New Literary History*, a congenial setting for new interrogations. The essay was an elaborate account, in phenomenological terms, of the experience of reading: the fact that in a dim light some parts of it could be mistaken for mere impressionism was not a real nuisance, mainly because existentialist gestures, then recently accredited, licensed the indulgence. I associate those early days, too, with the interest some critics were showing in the theory of "speech acts" and the possible application of work by J. L. Austin and John Searle to the processes of reading poems. For a while, I thought reader-criticism might make common cause with the critics who were working toward a theory of "performance", critics as different in other respects as Jean-François Lyotard and Richard Poirier, but Fish and his colleagues have stopped far short of the wider shores of post-modernist criticism; they have shown little interest in apocalypses. In Britain, reader-criticism has taken up where Lubbock left off. The essays in Ian Gregor's *Reading the Victorian Novel* (1980) are not much concerned with developing a theory of reading, but they strain to describe and question the actual experience of reading nineteenth-century novels: they are engaged with such questions as the reader (who?), fish, reading, re-reading, reading as a sequence in time, the page, and the book as a whole, remembering and forgetting, the tempo of reading.

Fish's first book, *John Skelton's Poetry* (1965), seemed at the time a critical interpretation, in method like any other, a reading of Skelton's poems on the assumption that they contained meanings which for various reasons remained to be disclosed. Wise sixteen years after the event, I now see that there were at least three places in the book where the shape of a reader-criticism to come could have been discerned. In the first, Fish characterized "the poetry of definition" as one in which "the reader is asked to observe" and perhaps join a mind in the process of making moral choice. If you understand the process and regard "perhaps join" as a proposal, however tentative, to understand reading as a joint responsibility of text and reader, you see that the early Fish could become a later and different Fish. In the second place, he spoke of Skelton

## Words on the Page

In the bare bedroom,  
with the wire handle  
hanging like a chin strap,

one white hilly can  
holds in its head  
a vision of flowers

and Argyle grates  
unplugging their feed,  
incumbent.

still, sharply, printed  
by your underwear,  
you pluck two earrings,

yes by one, like fruit,  
and bring yourself to bed  
with hanging loaves.

Craig Raine

## Making room for the reader

By Denis Donoghue

"Inviting the reader familiar with the fifteenth century lyric to assume he is reading a certain kind of poem, only to frustrate his response by inserting the diction and *topoi* of another, forcing him to turn from the narrative which is no longer a reliable focal point to the mind which may be". A poem that makes promises only to break them offers the reader a special experience, if he can rise to its occasion.

The third place was a passage in which Fish quoted Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* (Book 2, Section 6) on the question of difficult tropes in Scripture. Augustine says we learn the truth more willingly through figures and tropes, "and we discover it with much more delight when we have experienced some trouble in searching for it" ("Nunc tamen nemo ambigit, et per similitudines libentius quæque cognoscit et cum aliquo difficultate quæstia multo gratius invenit"). Fish took this to mean that "figurative language is valuable because it evokes an intellectual response from a reader". If you read the *Paradise Lost* in this spirit, taking its difficult figurative language not as a

problem to be solved but as a particular kind of experience to be negotiated, you would read it as Fish read it in his second book, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (1967). The text—the poem—would appear "not a spatial object but the occasion for a temporal experience".

Fish displaces attention from the poem to the reader; or rather, from the poem as a container of meanings to the reader as a producer of experience. The poem becomes a trope for the production of a certain kind of experience, mainly intellectual or semantic: like a recipe, it holds out the possibility of an event. The act of reading is called interpretation, but the aim of interpretation is not to disclose a meaning but to effect in the interpreter a certain experience. The experience is best understood as a process. There is no point in talking about the meaning of *Paradise Lost* as something separable from the process of reading it. Milton's method, Fish argues in *Surprised by Sin*, is "to recreate in the mind of the reader the drama of the Fall, to make him fall again exactly as Adam did". Not exactly; all that

Milton's language can do is make the reader imagine what it would be like to fall, as Adam did. But the imagining is indeed a process, experienced in time and sequence.

It follows that the best poems are those that give the reader most to do; not necessarily the most complex, if complexity is taken to mean a structure elaborate, dense, richly compact, difficult. Fish's favourite poems are not treated as elaborate problems to be solved, or messages to be decoded; they are usually poems that force the reader to revise, as they proceed, the terms upon which the reading began; poems that deny the logic of their premises or dismantle in practice the principles they started out by announcing. Many of the works studied in Fish's third book, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth Century Literature* (1972), are self-consuming in the sense of self-doubting or self-prejudging-to-doubt. Many of them encourage the reader to believe that literature is one of the performing arts. Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* fends off the reader's melan-

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John C. Raine



choly, as much as the writer's, by keeping his mind busy. The point of *Religio Medici* is to see how ingeniously Browne can keep the sentences going with a show of faith in themselves. But some poems, like Herbert's first "Temper", have produced from Fish a reading pretty much like anyone else's. Nothing in his account of Herbert undermines the common understanding that Herbert's poems negotiate the profession of humility and the pride that goes with the profession.

In general, Fish takes any term that seems to imply the poem as a container of meaning and translates it into a term applicable to the reader. A genre, for instance, becomes not a kind of work or a work understood as such within a certain tradition, but a kind of response, a particular disposition on the reader's part. Communication is rarely mentioned, and never construed as the process by which a message is passed from giver to receiver. In Fish's version communication is translated into shared notions and prejudices: we can communicate because we hold this lot in common and within uncertain limits we can ring changes upon it. In the four new essays he introduces the idea of "the interpretive community", partly to counter the argument that when you identify the text with a reader's experience of it, anything goes: criticism becomes autobiography.

Fish needs the notion of the interpretive community also as a defence against the charge that he is a relativist, a sceptic, or a solipsist. His present position is that while the reader reads as an individual, he reads within a community of interpretation which constitutes the objects upon which its members can agree. Presumably there are many such communities: if you are, say, a man, a Catholic, a Sunday painter, a snooker-player, and a garage-mechanic, you have at least five communities, large or small, within which you interpret. These communities, according to Fish, are "grounded in a bedrock of belief", although he has nothing to say about the origin and process of such belief.

If you are a teacher of literature in an American university, or a graduate student there, you have a choice of communities, each of them professionally respectable. The liveliest part of Fish's argument is that the text you read is always "a function of the interpretive perspective" from which you "discover" or produce it. Interpretation precedes evidence. The evidence Kathleen Raine produces to support her interpretation of Blake's "The Tyger" is not, Fish maintains, evidence at all: having interpreted the poem in a certain

way, or rather, having produced as "the poem" a certain experience, Ms Raine sets about finding lore or other material somehow cognate to the experience, offering this as evidence. But even if this were held to be the case, Fish can't explain why she chooses one "reading" rather than another, from a long list of professionally sanctioned possibilities.

I am pleased to see that Fish's idea of the interpretive community is offered as a social structure: indeed, it may be received instead of the browbeatingly-available notion of language so dear to word-obsessed critics.

What I have been arguing is that meanings are already calculated, not because of norms embedded in the language but because language is always perceived, from the very first, within a structure of norms. That structure, however, is not abstract and independent but social, and therefore it is not a single structure with a privileged relationship to the process of communication as it occurs in any situation but a structure that changes when one situation, with its assumed background of practices, purposes, and goals, has given way to another.

But I don't see how these considerations provide a safeguard or establish the rules of sanity. Fish assumes that readers and critics act as "extensions of an institutional community", but he doesn't allow for the fact that one's relation to such a community may be aberrant, or indeed that the community may be crazy. The experience of reading professional literary journals makes this latter notion quite conceivable.

One of the strategic advantages of Fish's theory of reading is that it allows him to brush aside many questions which bother other critics. His theory, as such, has little to say about literature, except to deny that it may be known through its formal properties: literature is still a category, but a category definable "simply by what we decide to put into it." "We" are the interpretive community of people engaged in that enterprise. The distinction between ordinary language and literary language, since both have at heart "that realm of values, intentions, and purposes which is often assumed to be the exclusive property of literature".

It is hard to say how seriously Fish intends these peace-making exercises. His own criticism favours one kind of literature, the kind in which the

reader is forced into the discomfort of revising his beliefs: perhaps Fish has the same preference among newspaper-articled, but it is improbable. In *Self-Consuming Artifacts* he distinguishes between two kinds of prose in the seventeenth century: one, the prose that leads the reader "step-by-step, in a logical and orderly manner, to a point of certainty and clarity"; the other, the prose that "undermines certainty and moves away from clarity, complicating what had at first seemed perfectly simple, raising more problems than it solves." Fish prefers the second kind, presumably because the experience it provokes is livelier, its consequences better for the soul in the long run. The preference is convenient, too, because it removes Fish still further from the stigma of sensations and affections associated with Impressionism.

In some cases the peace-making is ingenious. In *The Living Temple* (1978) Fish starts from the fact that some readers find Herbert's poetry secure while other readers find it restless. How can it be secure and restless at the same time? Fish's answer is: by proceeding in accordance with the forms of Reformation catechizing. The relation between catechist and pupil becomes the relation between poet and reader: the poem is the poet's effort to catechize the reader, to make him change his mind. Very neat; but it leaves the poet in the position of the catechist, by definition and vocation secure rather than restless. Since experience is an inductive rather than an exclusive term, Fish regularly uses it to transcend scholarly disputes: it makes for a rhetoric of "both/and" rather than of "either/or", but it is not always convincing.

There are other problems. Who is the reader? In early essays, Fish had in view the informed reader, corresponding to the gentle or judicious reader invoked in Augustan literature; but that was not a helpful notion. In more recent work, he has skirted the question: many of his sentences hypostatize "the reader", having carefully avoided hypostatizing "the poem." Presumably, the reader is a member of whatever interpretive community he happens to belong to. The obvious comparison is with "the scientist" who works within a certain community of scientists according to—in Thomas Kuhn's phrase—whatever paradigm is dominant for the time being. So long as the paradigm holds, "the scientist" is the one who knows the rules of the game and plays it; when the paradigm changes, he must change accordingly or suffer relegation to an archaic division. "The reader" is still, therefore, "the

informed reader", since he must be sufficiently informed to stay in the game.

Fish has identified another problem in his theory: "it contains no room for evaluation." Certainly it does not help you to distinguish between poems, or to decide that the poems of Milton and Herbert are so good that you must write two books about them or burst. "All aesthetics, then", Fish insists, "are local and conventional rather than universal, reflecting a collective decision as to what will count as literature, a decision that will be in force only so long as a community of readers or believers (it is very much an act of faith) continues to abide by it." The trouble is that if your theory keeps the rope as slack as this, you have to resort to some other procedure to tighten it. It is only by a minority decision, the consensus of the academic community as opposed to the market-place, that Doris Lessing is literature and Judith Krantz is not: the commercial verdict has gone the other way. Fish's theory is of no help in these matters. I can see why he wants a loose, liberal order, but I'm still surprised that he has not pursued the logic of his own discrimination, converting his taste into a principle.

To bring these considerations together: the old essays as well as the new ones in *Text* show that Fish has always understood reading as a semantic process; the accredited experience is always an intellectual one, in the first instance at least. The theory does not forbid pleasure, but it bids it in one form only, the pleasure of the intellect.

## Supplying the sources

By Rosemary Ashton

GEORGE ELIOT:  
A Writer's Notebook 1854-1879 and  
Uncollected Writings  
Edited by Joseph Wiesenfarth  
301pp. The University Press of Virginia  
\$25.00  
0 8139 0887 6

George Eliot scholars will be pleased to have the text of another of her notebooks made available to them. "A Writer's Notebook" is a book of quotations written down by her probably between 1854 and 1879.

The manuscript is at Yale, and has hitherto been known as "George Eliot's Commonplace Book". The present editors make rather too much of the importance of retelling the notebook, claiming that it relates more closely to her preparation for her novels than the previous lists suggests. Undoubtedly many of the entries do complement those in her "Quarries" for her works—millinery fashions of the 1790s for *Adam Bede*, or details about floods for *The Mill on the Floss*, for example—but one senses a strain after critical significance when Joseph Wiesenfarth quibbles about the kind of notes we find here. We do not need to be told how important notebooks recording scholarly facts and literary quotations were for George Eliot's creative work. For that we have, as well as the novels themselves, Gordon Haight's scrupulous recounting of her writing habits in his biography.

The problem is knowing how to make critical use of our knowledge of her note-taking. Wiesenfarth draws our attention to her extensive quotations in 1857 from Samuel Smiles's *Life of George Stephenson*, *Railway Engineer* and her remark in a letter that she had gained "profit and pleasure" from the work. But his "model" for Adam Bede, on such grounds as both having a favourite dog and both being night-school students, only shows how difficult it is to deal with source material and its transmission into art. For one thing, other elements of creation, such as invention, are left out of account. For another, the material in itself rarely holds a clue to the success or failure of its absorption by the artist. For example, George Eliot's letters here from Pridmore John Gilmary's *British Forest Trees* and Wiesenfarth comments: "since Adam Bede is the 'Don Quixote' of the woods, Eliot had to know about trees." Yes indeed, but what more is there to be said?

Also included in this volume are a few of George Eliot's previously uncollected essays, most of them from the not widely accessible *Newspaper Leader*. These are welcome additions, particularly the two early articles on Ruskin, in which she expresses sympathy with his view on art and more, and the importance of genuine observation in the pursuit of art.

ure the mind takes in wilderness its interrogations. The pleasure inscribed in the opulent landscape from Pater to Barthes is not so much a place for the reader as a place for the literature of sublimity or aberration. Barthes's texts of bliss (*jouissance*). All the texts of category, "the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, linked to a comfortable practice of reading". That is: Fish's texts are always already received, they accommodate within the academic community is secure, quite free of risk. The curriculum is confined to works which are, in Barthes's living sense, *livable*.

I have not emphasized the attractiveness, the attractive force, of Fish's essays. It is a great pleasure to read these days to find a critic willing to "dislocate" language, literature, reading, writing, and the community of readers on the margins of the production of his experience; that he does more than his dictation from the codes he acquires. It is also exhilarating to find a critic who shows that several literary problems remain problems only because we insist on retelling them in congealed forms: displace them, translate them into another form, and you find they lose much of their power to hurt. As for teachers and students are as well as some of Fish's anecdotes suggest, it will be more than his sanity to save us. It is that another essay's work.

Indeed, perhaps the only lesson to be learnt from the spectacle of scholars seeking significance in this field is a negative one. The most interesting and helpful editorial elucidation here concerns learned words used by George Eliot for her most studied and, partly for that reason, her least successful works, *Romola*, and *The Spanish Gypsy*. The many entries from C. W. King's *Antique Gems: Their Origin, Uses, and Value as Interpreters of Ancient History; and as Illustrative of Ancient Art; with Hints to Gem Collectors*, with their historical details of the mystical as well as financial value placed on certain gems, clearly did find their way into *Romola*, but not in such a way as to bring us imaginatively nearer to a remote milieu.

Yet it is interesting to observe, with Wiesenfarth's help, how Eliot returned to her notebooks again and again: the lore of gems was useful for *David Copperfield*, her turquoises for *Deronda*, too, (turquoise being thought a lucky gem for horoscopes, according to King). Anna Jameson's *Sacred and Legendary Art* provided legends similar to that of St Oge and may also have given material for *Romola*; and John Arlott Punt's *Pharmacologia* was probably drawn on for herbal legend and medical suggestion in *Peltis*, *Hals*, *Silas Marner*, and *Middlemarch*.

Wiesenfarth's notes are, full and informative. It is helpful, too, to have his translations from foreign languages, though some of his renderings from French and German are loose: in one case Wiesenfarth seriously mistranslates a Goethe poem, rendering "Alter, nicht du mich suchst" as "Pay no attention to me but search for me ever going, to me". The great variety and horrendous descriptions of the world have not yet gone down, I am sure, as a metaphor for the fate of the civilized world, but if we are to participate in this game, we must be prepared to be something as monstrous as the Dunkirk evacuation of catastrophe into victory.

From the technical point of view, Wiesenfarth has attempted something which has defeated him and which would probably have defeated even Joyce. Question: what do the North Atlantic in April 1912, Havana in the 1960s and Berlin in the 1970s have in common? Answer: they all had people in them. Apart from that they have nothing in common, and that is why the task he has undertaken of combining them into a single idea has proved insuperably difficult except at

## Wails from the icy water

By R. J. Hollingdale

HANS MAGNUS ENZENSBERGER:  
The Sinking of the Titanic  
98pp. Manchester: Carcanet. £3.95.  
0 8535 372 8

In an article on book reviewing in a recent edition of the *Spectator*, Christopher Booker laid it down that

the absolute essential of any honest book review... is that it should give an answer to the three great critical questions: what is this book trying to say? Is it worth saying? and how well does it say it? So long as a serious attempt is made to answer these three questions, the reviewer is free to dress them up in any way he likes... But somewhere, from the result, it must be possible for the reader to glean a reasonable answer to the three primary questions—and if this is not the case, then the reviewer has failed in the only aspect of his task which must be called a duty.

This seems a sane and sensible definition of the reviewer's duty.

What is this book trying to say? Well, here we go again: full steam ahead into disaster. The *Untergang des Abendlandes* once more puts out on its doomed maiden voyage. This time the passengers are "the Chicanos, Eskimos and Palestinians", and they of course get the worst of it when the ship sinks: but the rest of us are merely no better off. Let us out! We are suffocating, we cry, but to no avail: "We go down softly, broken and sagging/soggy." Help!—but once more "Captain Lord is leaning idly over the breastrail of his rotten tramp", the California, and letting us all go to perdition. And once more the "news wires" hum, announcing that the lights are going out all over the Titanic; once more the icy waters close over the ship of fools, broken and gilt-edged men. But once again, there are survivors.

We are left over, we are left over, we are left over here by chance. We were all in the same boat.

When it is all over once more, the author reflects on it:

I ask myself, is just a matter of a few dead passengers, or do I watch the whole human race over there, happily chattering on to some run-down cord line. If for the scrypad/dend beaded for self-destruction?

We are all in the same boat and it is called the Titanic. It is also called whatever the place you may happen to be living in is called in Enzensberger's case it is called Havana ("We did not know that the party had hushed long ago" and Berlin ("which had outlived its own and long ago"). All *Kaputt*, all gone under. But the survivors, of whom Enzensberger is one, must continue to try to stay afloat!

"The Doomsday year, I wail, is not yet clear: let's have no let's have another year... Chilly, hard to say why, I continue to wail, and to swim."

Is it worth saying? The answer to this question must depend on whether you think the sinking of the Titanic by an iceberg an adequate metaphor for the state of Europe and the world—for the "human predicament"—in 1980. My own answer is that it isn't. My own answer is that it isn't. My own answer is that it isn't.

From the technical point of view, Enzensberger has attempted something which has defeated him and which would probably have defeated even Joyce. Question: what do the North Atlantic in April 1912, Havana in the 1960s and Berlin in the 1970s have in common? Answer: they all had people in them. Apart from that they have nothing in common, and that is why the task he has undertaken of combining them into a single idea has proved insuperably difficult except at

*Titanic* is in thirty-three "cantos", with sixteen intercalated poems; the cantos, by and large, tell the story, the intercalated poems refer to it obliquely, some of them very obliquely. When he allows himself to do so, Enzensberger can write very powerful and convincing narrative verse: the fifth Canto, forty-six excellent lines on the failure of the steerage passengers of the Titanic to take their rescue into their own hands; the twelfth Canto is twenty-eight excellent lines on the evacuation of the ship; the fourteenth Canto is thirty-two excellent lines on the ship slowly filling with water; the seventeenth Canto is twenty-two excellent lines on the ship going down; the eighteenth Canto is twenty-five excellent lines on the cries of the survivors in the sea—strong narrative poetry capable of engaging those "people who don't read poems" for whom Enzensberger produced his first volume of verse in English. He shows us it is still possible to write a poem in English about a shipwreck which never for a moment brings to mind "The Wreck of the Hesperus", let alone *McDonagall*.

And there is more fine verse: four of the inserted poems, for instance, are descriptions of painters and their paintings. They may be imitations of Browning, perhaps as communicated by Pound; they are certainly Browningesque, whether by design or not, and they would easily establish their author's reputation if he were unknown.

But—and it's a big but—everything about *The Sinking of the Titanic* is not as happily achieved as this. There is the matter of his wit, his comedy. The *Purgatorio* of Dante, you will recall, is also in thirty-three cantos, and the otherwise unmotivated appearance of Dante in several places here (the poem "Identical Check", inserted after the twenty-third Canto, is wholly devoted to him), and as a passenger aboard the doomed liner, must be intended to draw attention to this fact. We are being invited, it seems, to regard *The Sinking of the Titanic* as Enzensberger's *Purgatorio*. The invitation is pressed home through the employment of a simple *leitmotiv* technique. In the fourth canto, the author tells us that he has written a poem called "The Sinking of the Titanic"—"It was a good poem", he adds, rightly shunning false modesty—and that it was "pencilled into a notebook, wrapped up in black oilcloth", in the last canto, in a list of seafarers who are heading for destruction, we are told that "the gentleman clad in white, holding a manuscript wrapped in black oilcloth, is undoubtedly Dante." Let us not dwell on the awful risk of annihilation Enzensberger is running by inflicting this comparison upon himself: we should, however, not fail to notice the pretentiousness of his scheme: nor to question whether anything except complex myth is really gained by the imposition of Dante upon the sinking of the Titanic.

But this is not nearly all. The story told by *The Sinking of the Titanic* is not, as you might think, the story of the sinking of the Titanic. It is the story of Enzensberger's life from the late 1960s, when he was in Havana, to the late 1970s, when he was in Berlin. "The Sinking of the Titanic" is a poem he wrote which was lost in the post; the shipwreck scenes we are given here are as much of it as he can remember. "That at least appeared to be the case, I am not saying that this is a fiction invented so as to make use of pieces of an epic lost upon the Titanic which he was in mind; possibly, to make lengthy enough for the kind of publication he had in mind; but I do say that the further complexity of the text thus resulting constantly imperils whatever dramatic pressure the narrative—whether of Enzensberger's life or of the sinking of the Titanic—may have. It makes this very 'literary' work—in the pejorative sense.

From the technical point of view, Enzensberger has attempted something which has defeated him and which would probably have defeated even Joyce. Question: what do the North Atlantic in April 1912, Havana in the 1960s and Berlin in the 1970s have in common? Answer: they all had people in them. Apart from that they have nothing in common, and that is why the task he has undertaken of combining them into a single idea has proved insuperably difficult except at

the level of extreme generalization—"It's all Purgatory, mate!" Havana and Berlin appear in this poem presumably only because Enzensberger happens to have lived in them—which was back luck for him, since neither city lends itself very easily to being likened to the floundering Titanic. Technically, the nearest he gets to a successful fusion of at any rate two of his disparate locations is in the ninth Canto, in which he describes a visit to a Havana cinema, where he sees "Barbara Stanwyck... hopping about with Clifton Webb" in a film set on a ship: even here, though, he withholds the information that the film is called *Titanic* and features the never-to-be-forgotten night to remember as its climax and conclusion. That, however, is the best he can do, the worst, perhaps, occurs at the end of the third Canto, when he

looked out with an absent mind over the quay at the Caribbean Sea, and there I saw it... I saw the iceberg, looming high and cold...

An—or rather "the"—iceberg off Havana? Of course, it is an illusion—"I was the only one to see it"—but is it not, artistically speaking, very forced? A failure, in fact?

Enzensberger has, it seems to me, been unable to elude the younger of the twin ancestral curses of the house of German letters: inferior imitation of foreign models. The third Canto, for example, begins:

I remember Havana, the plaster coming down from the walls, a foul insistent smell/choking the harbor, the past voluptuously fading, and scarcely giving away, day and night, the Ten Year Plan.

Whom does that remind you of? There is a touch of Hemingway in it: "You know how it is there early in the morning in Havana with the bums still asleep against the walls of the buildings, before even the ice wagons come by with ice for the bars?" (*To Have and Have Not*). But the chief resemblance is to another writer of Cantos:

I sat on the Dogana's steps  
For the gondoliers cost too much, that year,  
And there were not 'those girls', there was one face  
And the Bucentauro twenty yards off,  
howling 'Stretti'... (Canto III)

There is more that is Pound-like: "It must have happened in June, no, it was April, shortly before Easter we took a walk down the Rampa. It was past midnight, Maria Alexan- looked at me, her eyes shining with rage. Herberto Padilla smoked a cigar."

The self-correction, as though you are talking not writing, the introduction of unexplained names (Maria, Alexandrovna is Enzensberger's wife, but I don't know who Herberto Padilla is: this is Pound at his most imitable. "News" Wires of April 15, 1912", inserted after the nineteenth Canto, is John Dos Passos, even to the American "wires". The thirteenth Canto is put together from bits of byzantine, like a travesty of *The Waste Land*.

There are other obscurities in the text, of a kind that reflection—mine, at least—cannot pierce. Here is the thirty-second Canto entire:

Later on, when the furnace room had darkened completely, there was nobody left except the dead man, and an unknown woman. For and friend had become one and the same, something Other. The unknown woman heard his even breath:

sloped down to him in the dark, closed his eyelids, kissed him, and with her one and only mouth took him alone.

Question: whose even breath did the unknown woman hear?

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our membership of which television has persuaded us to renounce.

Arlen notes that the medium destroys ingrained habits of commonality in order to re-enfranchise us as its legions of dependents. We're now citizens of the box, communing with talk-show hosts, newscasters and weather forecasters. Alienating us from one another, television plugs us separately into its own society of flickery, fickle electronic celebrity. Arlen sees the Oscars ceremony as an indoor, artificial parade, a substitute for the military or patriotic processions of the nineteenth century. When the refractory world from which television has sealed itself off intrudes, the box grows censorious and tunes out the offending truths. Americans grew tired of the Vietnam war because it insisted on enacting itself nightly in their living rooms on the television news. Withdrawing troops became cognate with changing the channel. Lyndon Johnson accepted that the war couldn't be won only when Walter Cronkite told him so on CBS. Arlen is superb on the network reporting of the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island in 1979 when, for a moment, television's insulating blandness failed and an alarming reality seeped into the vacuum. But Cronkite, who on March 30 1979 admitted his fear, soon regained his composure and returned to his solemn nocturnal benediction of the status quo ("That's the way it is"): inimical reality was once again kept at bay.

By its stealthy work of mediation, television converts whatever it transmits into an interior and an image of itself. Albert Hunt comments in his *Language of Television* on the medium's self-absorption: its conduct is narcissistically self-referring, and its "new and particular language" is "that element in a programme which can only be fully appreciated by an audience familiar with other programmes in the series". Though it has a reputation for slave-like mental lassitude, television demands of its adept an encyclopaedic lore and learning, and tests them with recondite allusions to its own past. Hunt remarks on the esotericism of Morecambe and Wise routines, in which jokes will "refer back to a sketch... performed years earlier". The box is not ever admitting itself in the supplementary screen of a mirror. The repertoire of mimics like Mike Yarwood or Janet Brown is confined to characters invented by or tenanted within the television set, and the rubbery plasticity of their countenances makes them in their turn self-images of television. The mediocrity of the messages entrusted to them. This is why Yarwood is so embarrassing and unreal when he ceases his facial contortions and vocal tricks and becomes, for a change, himself, perhaps to sing a song. How dare he pretend to be someone, we feel? He is merely the sum total of the fictional people he counterfeits. The American hosts used to greet their audiences as "those of you out there in television land", testifying to their conviction that the box voids itself not into the open air but into other box-sized "receptacles" where, securely, we're plugged into the set as securely as the set is plugged into the electricity mains. Arlen often catches

television fictionalizing fact and locking the product in an airtight unreal. The talk shows, for instance, are simulations of hospitality, in which talk is staged as a show; and investigative reports like CBS's *60 Minutes* televisually substitute confrontation and indignation—the cameras aimed at houses which won't admit them, or harrying guilty parties who flee from them—for argued indictment.

The more conscientiously veristic television tries to be, the more subtly unreal is the likely result. Of this television rule. Tony Wilkinson's *Down and Out* (the diary of his spell, at *Nationwide*'s behest, as a dossier) is an ironic exemplification. Documentation, on television, means playing-act. The camera and microphone may affect to be neutral observers, but they're all the time promoting, provoking, arranging the event they want to record. The dupe of the medium he works for, Wilkinson, after an itchy and indignant month in hostels and on the streets, is unable to understand the derelicts and winos he's consorted with, and his investigative adventure—as refracted by television—looks like an experiment in radical chic, a bout of safe and cosy slumming. Wilkinson the would-be tramp was the confection of the BBC's costume and make-up departments. "His clothes were carefully selected and deliberately soiled" with a consumer's astute attention to brand names—"even the labels in the shirts had to be vetted". The cigarette burns in his tattered coat were "carefully manufactured". Like a dandified punk on the King's Road, he was given a bad haircut on purpose, with (he notes with a grimace of aggrieved vanity) "a crude bias to the left". He wore his stench and grime like the cosmetics they were: "brown powder and grease" had been massaged into his hair, which streamed red when he was required to take a shower at one hostel, almost betraying him. He was warned dietically by a BBC doctor, who sagely advises him "to concentrate on... fish and chips" because the carbohydrate will keep out the cold.

Throughout the charade, Wilkinson retains the media man's proprietorial anxiety about his technological kit. He carried a microphone inside a beaten-up radio, and when sleeping rough in charitable dormitories he begged it to him for fear his colleagues might make off with it. The risks taken by the camera man were yet more awesome: he too "sometimes had to disguise himself as a down-and-out, concealing his £15,000 camera in a shoulder bag". That sentence gives the game away. For television's affluent professionals, the thrill and peril of the imposture lay in endangering so much expensive hardware. The verminous existence probed by Wilkinson is even honorifically referred to as an "irresponsible life style" as if it were a phenomenon of the counter-culture, not an impoverished underground.

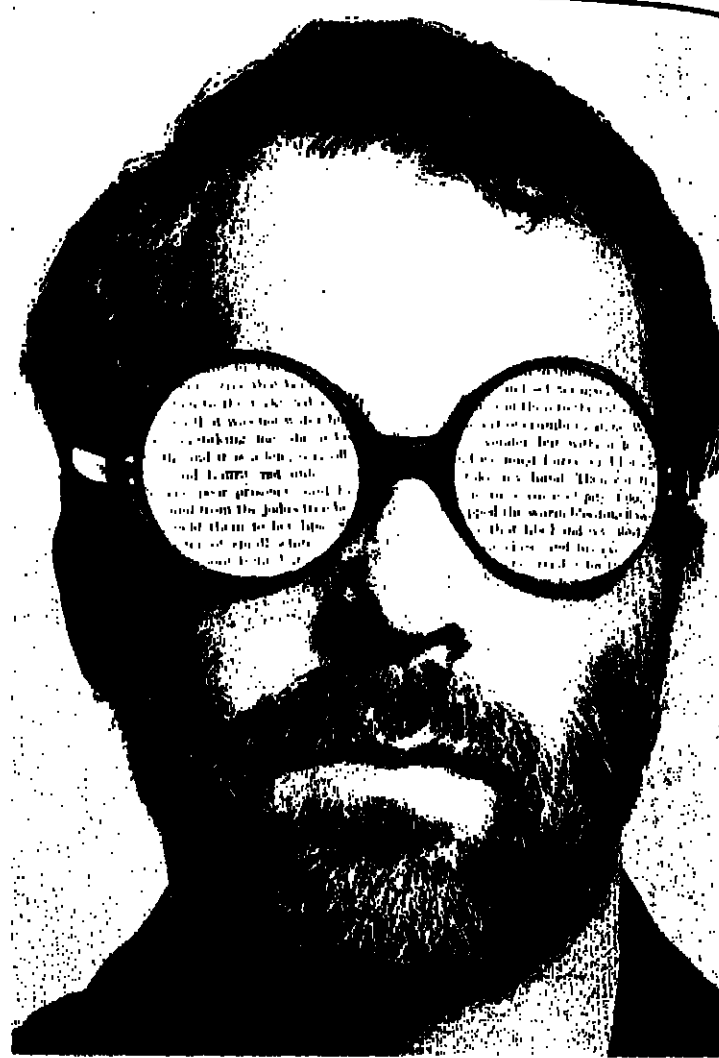
Wilkinson, to do him credit, does blush at the incoherence of his impersonation, and it's interesting that when he needs a metaphor for his queasy inauthenticity, he turns to the

medium whose bidding he does. Telephoning Beeb cronies to report on his progress, "I recounted conversations, gave descriptions, wallowed in anecdote like a cheap guest on a TV chat-show". Nor, in the flea-pits he patronizes, is he exiled from the charmed ambit of television. He's among fellow enthusiasts for the medium. The dossiers pass their vacant time by watching the box, and engage in scholastic disputes about whether *Kojak* is on at "a quarter past" or, as the television page of the *Sun* alleges, "seventeen minutes past". They spot one of the guest stars as a refugee from *High Chaparral*, and when asked to account for their day will tally up the things they've seen not the things they've done. One of them "had been to the cinema to see *The Shining* and... had watched the telly". In this lawless underworld, the ultimate sanction which can be imposed on the reprobate is the withdrawal of television privileges. A notice in a cheap hotel advises the residents "that the television set would not be replaced, since four previous sets had been smashed by them and the rental company had come to the end of its patience". Wilkinson girds himself to enter the enemy's lair. "I asked the concierge how much it would cost to stay among such forthright critics of the very medium I worked for".

Because Wilkinson remains so reportorially self-conscious, like a discreetly prurient camera lens, he's unable to comprehend the tramps among whom he lives. He accuses only of rationalizing his own distress and shame at being temporarily déclassé. The real tramps aren't, like him, made miserable by self-consciousness. For the most part, they seem solipsistically content, boozily quarrelling about Shakespeare or attesting that "Jesus is right here... talking to the angels" under the arches at Charing Cross. They have dillitantly exempted themselves from the freilful ambitious world in which Wilkinson distinguishes himself. An African abuses a Scot: "I'll sue you for every penny you've got". The skint Scot wryly rejoins: "Well, you won't get very much suing them, you know?" There's a happy, inventive economy of bricolage, assembling cardboard cartons into beds and recycling newspapers as elderdowns. (Wilkinson, irredeemably affluent, risks discovery because the papers he begs down on the *Guardian* and the quality Sundays—are too "transparently up-market".)

"Why do men... choose to be dossers?" he asks himself, and the only answer he can find is, "because they do not choose at all". But television has intervened between him and the truth. They do choose it: Wilkinson alone feels the life to be a penance, an affliction, though he too has undertaken it of his own free will and for the greater glory of *Nationwide*. His discomfort and his protesting lips have little to do with the life he is disavowing. He is distraught for televisual reasons. His period of destitution is the television personality's nightmare; not because of its squalor, but because of its necessary imposition of invisibility. Television's purpose is the celebration of visibility. Its celebrities are immortalized not by eminence but by exposure. Their fame doesn't derive from their accomplishments but from the fact of their being perpetually ubiquitously visible. They appear on talk shows not to converse or even to tout their latest film or book but just to register that they're still around, still keeping faith with the camera, still permitting themselves to be seen.

The televisual criterion of success is what Luciano Pavarelli's business manager—baying, after a series of American Express commercials and a series of interviews—scooking himself on talk shows, made him: client famous not for his voice but for his figure and ultimately, with the pure evocation of content which is television's formal triumph, for being famous—strenuously called "recognizability". Wilkinson's fate, for the month of his experiment, was the dreary limbo of unrecognizability, which in television's judgment equals nonentity. He was required to keep a low profile and obscure low profile. This is why he cleaved in his first television interview in the docks, hoping they might validate his



Two of Stuart Sherman's Spectacles, the tenth and the twelfth, entitled "Portraits of Places" and "Language" respectively, were put on at the Art Gallery, London, and the Arrol-John, last Thursday and Friday. A Stuart Sherman Spectacle, we are told, "consists of many brief manipulations each demonstrating a complex idea through a precise sequence of simple actions performed with common objects in unusual contexts. The manner of performance is rapid and informal."

diminished existence by recognizing him.

Television is at home, of course, not with the dingy deprivation Wilkinson experiences but among the gleaming novelties of the department stores and the supermarkets. The set which Walter Benjamin believed to be a consumer durable which devotes itself, in its ads, to the praise of its fellow consumer durables. Michael Arlen's *Thirty Seconds* studies the making of a single commercial, while implicitly analysing the genre of the ad, which is another of television's idiosyncratic and self-admiring forms. *Thirty Seconds* is a video *Prater Violet*, and like Isherwood on the film set, Arlen studiously keeps his own counsel, leaving the bombastic executives and dithering starlets to convict themselves out of their own mouths. There's a deadly eloquence in his refusal to comment.

Simply by transcribing dialogue and keeping a noncommittal diary of the six months he expended on observing the manufacture of thirty seconds of television, he has defined an aesthetics for the ad. It's a form of lyric intensity and abbreviation and, like lyric poetry, its aim is the effluence of objects into feelings, of commodities into sentiments. It sells by emotional association, which means by symbol-making. It's a mythopoetic craft, animating inanimate things and making them carol with delight (a composer of ad ditties remembers an arduous chore for a brokerage firm: "after, all, investments are not usually something to sing about. But we pulled it off"). Television's sovereign ideology is consumerism—the injunction that we should enjoy our technological appliances, be grateful to our belonging, confess ourselves excited by our affluence (the cardinal sign of which is our ownership of a television set). The advertiser's Arlen (interviews consequently see in his mission to merchandise not particular articles so much as the hedonistic plan which these articles are guaranteed to provide. Recommending brands of beer or coffee, their "creative strategy" ignores the trivial matter of taste and strives instead to infuse those top-cats and glass jars with tremulous, conspicuous feelings.

The case Arlen has chosen to study is peculiarly apt and paradoxical, because it's an American Telephone and Telegraph ad for long-distance telephone calls. The wizards

scorn commendation of the phone as hardware: they propose to make it conduit for feelings, a cross-country umbilicus, a transmitter of *tingle* electronic love. It's the publicist's lyric applied to packaging, the rational of that sacred word, "and" which Walter Benjamin believed had been stripped from our sense-produced gadgetry. The campaign begins by banishing the negative taboo which lours over the long-distance call, its premonition of bad news in the middle of the night. The phone in the ad is characterized as a sensuous link between people, the theme song invites its users to "reach out and touch someone" by "touching the receiver. But herein lies the paradox which the ad boldly fronts: for the ditheringly lured truth is that the one thing you can't do on the telephone is touch your interlocutor. If you could, you wouldn't need to employ this plastic prostheses. The telephone, like the television set which in this ad claims its place as a device for technological mediation, not for communication. Our intimate messages have to be consigned and confined to "be" and "there" before they can be passed along to their destination. Each of us in our solitary booth is alone with the world mouthpiece, a stand-in for the lost one far off down the crackling line. Phone calls are more like masturbation than like coitus.

The ad, however, deals with this fact by blithely denying it. Like television, its insinuation is: that we should prefer the ersatz to the actual. In the words of the Jungian, spatial proximity is preserved in a technology that has assumed charge of our private lives.

People from coast to coast, Calling up friends to keep them close, Families who care so much, Keeping in touch—Reach out, reach out, and touch someone.

And for all its brazen artifice, the single may be right. Let it rather love the members of your family, your connection with their long-distance periodic long-distance calls. It would be if you were living with them? Wilkinson's uncertainty in *Down and Out* recurs in another form: isn't television more real than the unaccommodated reality? Is television the appropriate shorthand

simulating or symbolizing poverty for the benefit of the camera, feels the indignity of his condition more keenly than do those whose fate it truly is.

Like Wilkinson in his spurious tattered get-up, the admen in *Thirty Seconds* perform television's will by confiscating the reality of whatever they encounter. You can hear the habit in their language. Whenever they don't mean something, they inflate the sentiment by attaching to it that most famously unreal of adverbs, "really". The singer Phoebe Snow can't make the narration in the ad sound "warm" enough, so the copy writers give her a supernatural "really" to play with. She "reads the line again, this time putting a lot of emphasis on the 'really' and it sounds much better, much more natural". One of the technicians dilates on the advantages of the telephoto lens, which "gives you an effect that's less commercial and more real. Not really real, but more real than commercial." The same rhetoric of qualification and mediation—the specification of a reality that's really unreal—is

deployed by a maker of political commercials in Arlen's *Camera Age*. "What really counts in a campaign today", he says, alerting us by his Islamic invocation of "really" to the lurking presence of an unreality, "is trust. Or maybe I should say: a perception of trust." It's these televisual standards which have made "credibility" a measure of political probity, for to be credible doesn't mean that you're honest but only that you look it. The main concern of the news teams covering Reagan's campaign in 1980 for television was the credibility not of his policies but of his hair.

The assay of credibility is a televisual trial by image. At the audition with the commercial in *Thirty Seconds*, image outvotes actuality every time. A cowboy whose turf is the New York suburbs is surprised as a Southerner—"he says barnyard to me"; a hockey player from the Islanders team is filmed in the changing room with extras despatched from a modelling agency, "who, bizarrely, with their spiky red sweaters and pads, manage somehow to look more athletic than the Islanders'.

## The bonds of naturalism

By Malcolm Bradbury

GEORGE W. BRANDT (editor): *British Television Drama* 276pp. Cambridge University Press. £6.95. 0 521 394 784

British television drama is usually referred to as the best in the world—often in the tone of Dennis Potter, who once told us that the British television system was the least worst in the world. One central reason for its status is undoubtedly that the single play has remained a cornerstone of the system's endless seriality, which requires the constant and repetitious filling of long-time slots, and which for many of us has turned life in the sitting room into a depressing modern series called "Visual History", composed of rapid cutting from the hideous apocalypses of the daily news to crackling laughter and the prize quiz show. The single play has been under repeated threats: some of the commercial franchise companies have not fully institutionalized it, its ever-increasing technical budgets have increased anxiety, and its very institutionalization has often been an erosion of its possibilities. Yet it has been in essential part of the interest of British television as a medium, a unit of its independence.

Its claims to success are now massive. It has over the last two decades, and especially in the 1960s, developed a central stable of notable playwrights, some of these drawn over from other forms like the stage-play or the novel; others "evolving" purely within the medium itself (an engagement that, of course, often means working in series or adaptations, as well as single-slot plays). Their cumulative success, in television as on stage, has given us something of a writer's theatre, in which the author acquires active influence and public recognition. Television drama has similarly found an extraordinary *corps de théâtre* which includes many of our leading actors, whose ways of responding to the tonalities, gestures and codes of small-screen drama have had much to do with the form's successes. So too has the emergence of a cadre of excellent directors, elaborating their distinctive styles within the play's unit of possibility. And, through an elaborate institutional structure of contract and freelance attachment, television drama has acquired a notable apparatus of producers, script editors and others geared to producing artistic objects of extreme finesse. Finally, it has developed an admirable media technology, which, by appropriate expert users, has left the old, studio-based, television single plays of the 1950s looking in much the same condition of technological innocence as the silent film after the advent of talkies.

But all the successes have been achieved in the appropriate shorthand of the system who are also most

successful within it, winning bigger budgets, the right to location filming rather than studio videotaping, precisely because—as one of the contributors to *British Television Drama* remarks—it is often easier to let a film be shot and then banned as contentious than it is to scrap shooting once problems arise.

Television drama thus becomes, like any other art, an art of convention struggling towards transfiguration, save that here the conventions are massive and have institutional weight behind them, making television as much a matter of committees, budgetary decisions and deferential hierarchies as of noble acts of single creation. Conventionalization "occurs" in many ways. "If I see another play about a middle-aged, menopausal business man having an affair with his secretary, I shall kick the screen in." Alan Plater has been reported as saying: others might say the same about yet another play stocking up another layer of folklore around the General Strike. Through repetition, directorial and acting styles tend repeatedly toward cliché, reinforced by the conditions under which television plays are rehearsed and then made on tight schedules in studio time.

Happily there have been repeated signs of writers struggling with the convention-oriented skills which brought them into the medium in the first place, and the last few years have seen signs of a new fertility. As George Brandt points out in his helpful introduction to *British Television Drama*, many of the primary changes in the television play have been due to the skilful exploitation of technical developments. The "movement" from black-and-white "film" studio drama, which emphasized the centrality of the close-up and the use of "real time" through the coming of videotape in 1958, permitting limited filmic editing, and from this to increasing use of film, permitting the exteriorization of drama, the familiarization of setting, the intensification of artistic realism, but also, far more importantly, permitting the play to be put through a system of post-production editing, vastly more subtle and selective than that allowed by videotape—this has generated a new role for the director, a changed concept of the visual image, a more controlled stylistic grammar. So did the coming, under the pressure of the emergence of ITV, of the 625-line standard, and the institutionalization of colour between 1967 and 1969. A new precision came into visual signalling, and a new weight of attention went to the stylistic grammar, rather than the overt subject-matter of the play.

This parallel to, and as a result of, the technical changes there have been dramatic developments. One of the more notable has been the shift away from naturalistic concepts of drama—a campaign begun in a famous *Encore* article of 1964 by Troy Kennedy Martin, who had been involved in the institutionalization of naturalism via the Z-Car series. The left conquered with

him, attacking the consolatory functions of naturalism and its role of social manipulation—though it tended to support the campaign for radical documentary. Naturalism, however, had more than this wrong with it; it represented a massive over-exertion of the subject at the expense of the manner; and the need to question the mode of its own referentiality was in fact to be the seedbed of any sort of true experiment. Many of the better plays of recent years have challenged the habitual nature of television's language and signs. Plays like David Hare's *Licking Hitler*, Ian McEwan's *The Imitation Game*, Stephen Pollackoff's *Caught on a Train*, and the latest, notable round of works by Dennis Potter, have pressed with a new intensity of inquiry on the nature of propaganda, the authority of our images of plenty, the bodied folklore of our past.

George Brandt is thus right to urge in his introduction that the television play is a due subject for serious inquiry, attention outside and beyond the media. The TV play has, he says, been too much neglected in academic circles, though in fact the emergence of his book in paperback form from a serious academic publisher indicates a general number of study classes are already there. At the same time, his book does lay bare many of the problems of such a study. If, as Henry James once said about the novel, we need a criticism on other than infantile terms, and if now the storage and recording facilities permit this as once they did not (so many plays wiped from the slate for good), it seems hard to define the terms of a significant debate. Most of the reviewing of television plays takes place in the context of total rejection of the medium, permitting few generic discriminations. Thus, reviewers like Clive James skilfully take all television as an endless and often more or less seamless play, which you might say it is. But the stylistically contained work needs an account in its own terms, and an account means more than a review of themes; or a reiteration of the play's ostensible subject, or a discussion of the cunning of the playwright who cuts from one person at a party lighting a cigarette to a shot of another cigarette being extinguished in an ashtray.

As a display of possibilities, the present anthology of essays by diverse hands must be admitted to offer only limited promise. This is partly because of the choice of playwrights for attention. Despite the introduction amplifying the move away from naturalism, many of those chosen—Jim Allen, Trevor Griffiths, David Mercer, Alan Plater—have tended in much of their work to be leftward naturalists. This has often led in the essays here to naturalistic or reportorial readings of the plays, running a current of banality through the earlier part of the volume. Even writers not dominantly, or at all, ways, naturalistic are thus hpi to have their plays discussed naturalistically, so that the author-oriented essays too

plays lies in the stylistic guile by which, after an initial homage to the conventions of realism, they proceed to distend and deform those conventions. Like Yarwood or Janet Brown with their mimics or Clive James with those funny spellings which phonetically reproduce the diction of Mosley or Kissinger, McEwan knows that the only way to criticize television or to do innovative work on it is to parody it—which is, perhaps, a stratagem of despairing surrender to it. *Jack Flea's Birthday Celebration* begins from "a television cliché" and logically distorts it, warping the medium's prized reality into fantasy. At the same time it decomposes the family relations which the dinner party is supposed to fortify, and reduces sexual relations to thumb-sucking infantile regression. *The Imitation Game* is a carefully researched and meticulously furnished period piece, but its actual subject, as its development makes clear, is not the past but the computerized, encoded future.

In *Solid Geometry*, too, McEwan exploits the electronic liberties of the communications era. Television is a

relativistic machine, rendering all times and places simultaneous, assigning each its place around the dial, and it enables McEwan to switch back and forth between 1875 and 1975. He adjusts each of the plays to the box's claustrophobic proscenium. As the act is a container, so the plays are devices for containment—the house caging the antagonistic quartet in *Jack Flea*; the specimen jars with their severed, pickled members in *Solid Geometry*; the concentric circles of male power and the cell in which Cathy is imprisoned in *The Imitation Game*. *Solid Geometry* in particular reads like a commentary on the medium's formalistic trickery, that consumption of content which is the central, unsettling truth about television. Where do Maxwell and Maisie vanish to?—up their own anal tracts? Into the fourth dimension? Or perhaps, since McEwan enthuses over the "dazzling electronic techniques" which were to effect these disembodiments on videotape, they disappear into the all-absorbing, amnesiac box, the plane without a surface which is the eerie miracle of the television screen.

Indeed, the book itself seems plotted towards a gradually rising standard, and in later pages essays by Philip Pusey on Dennis Potter, Martin Banham on Jeremy Sandford, and S. M. J. Arrowood, a man who has evidently moved in semiotic circles, on Peter Watkins begin to put the spine back into the affair. The book's deadline evidently excluded from Pusey's essay the opportunity of discussing the next stage of the Potter story—the three ITV plays from Pennines from Heaven, which, marvelously endowed both financially and in their acting, directorial, production and editing talent, greatly extend his work, offering new, wry and haunting relationships between image and narrative outcome, fabule and point. But this is one of the essays that does make clear the importance of its subject, just as Mr Arrowood, perhaps helped by working on a writer-director, is able to get further than most into the reality, if such it be, of the television medium.

The book has valuable appendices, listing major plays available in published texts or stored in libraries on video, but what it lacks is some solid discussion of other playwrights who have pointed the way out of naturalism's bondage, in a wide variety of directions: Stoppard, with *Professional Foul*, Hare, with *Licking Hitler*, Michael Frayn, Alan Bennett, Frederic Raphael, John Mortimer, Simon Gray, Ian McEwan. All the same, it is a start, and it points towards what television drama desperately needs now, some kind of serious criticism that, while recognizing the technological and institutional nature of the medium, steps outside and beyond the media world.

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## Jonathan Cape

## commentary

### Better than the books

By Redmond O'Hanlon

Bread or Blood  
BBC TV

W. H. Hudson (1841-1922) was much admired in his own lifetime. Edward Garnett, a perceptive critic and a shrewd publisher and patron thought well of him; and Ford Madox Ford considered him one of the greatest of English prose writers. In *Castles in Spain* Galsworthy remembers that Conrad himself, whilst not a "lover of nature" yet "could be vividly impressed by the charm and the variety of such things. He was fond, too, of Hudson's books; and no lover of Hudson's work is insensitive to nature."

Yet when we turn to Conrad's actual opinion of Hudson (in "A Glance at Two Books", an unpublished review found amongst his papers) a different picture emerges, thoroughly relevant to this admirable five-part series. Conrad quotes Hudson's description of a spider stalking a dancing shadow on a leaf in *Green Mansions* and remarks:

"It was beautiful to the eye", so it drew the attention of Mr. Hudson's hero. In that phrase dwells the very soul of the book whose voice is soothing like a soft voice speaking steadily amongst the vivid changes of a dream. Only you must note that the spider had come to hunt its prey, having mistaken the small dancing shadow for a fly, because it is there, in the fundamental difference of vision, lies the difference between book and book. The other type of novelist might say: "It attracted my attention because it was so beautiful and beautiful only to the eye. And I have written of it here so that it may be heard and laughed at forever. For of course being greedy and rapacious it was stupid also, mistaking a shadow for substance, like certain evil men, we have heard of, that go about trying up the excellence of the world."

### Clean-handed

By Celina Fox

Artists in Print  
BBC TV, BBC Publications and the  
Institute of Contemporary Arts

It is ironic that the print, which was intended as a means of spreading art to a wider public, has more often than not been appreciated by an even narrower section of the population than those able to enjoy painting. As Pat Gilmore points out in her book of the recent TV series (BBC, 1989, £16.99), this phenomenon can be attributed partly to the methods adopted for publication: the ritual of signed, limited editions as well as the subtle variations in states and papers which can only be sorted out, it is thought, by the cognoscenti.

General illiteracy in the face of such rarefication is compounded by the problem of distinguishing between different techniques, juggling with "relief" and "intaglio", reversal and "registration" words which are misapplied to practical experience. Step-by-step guides in diagrams and photographs, together with close-ups of the end results, have long been available for individual methods. Now the BBC Continuing Education Advisory Council has made a gallant attempt by television programme, book and

The series script-writer Peter Ransley would certainly belong to this other type of novelist, as did Conrad; and *Bread or Blood*, a film savage and cruel and beautiful only to the eye, concerns itself with the greedy and rapacious landowners of the 1840s and 20s and the effects which their enclosure of the common lands, their placing of murderous spring guns triggered by tripwires in the woods, and the coincidental introduction of the new agricultural machinery, had upon the field labourer and his family. The tone of the film is much closer to Hardy than to Hudson, and just as well. William Rotherstein, in *Since Fifty: Men and Memories, 1922-1938*, remembering his having sent Hardy *The Agricultural Labourer* by the Hammonds, quotes from Hardy's letter of thanks:

With details of the last peasant revolt I have, of course, been familiar from childhood, though it occurred earlier than my actual recollection carries me. My father knew a man who was hanged for saying to a farmer 'It will be a light night' (his ricks being set fire to before the morning). As a child I personally knew a boy who was starved to death in 'the hungry forties' during my absence in London with my mother. He used to keep sheep near our house.

Whilst it is true that the main sources of rural memory in Hudson's *A Shepherd's Life* (1910) "are happily over, and things are a little the other way now, for the farm-labourers are very comfortable and better off than the London poor", nevertheless Hudson, certainly belongs to those "that go about trying up the excellence of the world". His style is clear, but then his content is often so light-weight as to appear transparent. There is no consistent story, no real conviction, no centrally imagined inner world. He is insistently condescending to his rural subjects, uneasy about his own social class, importunate for more little beads of stories to the natives to thread on the necklace of his anecdote. He can be twice ("I caught sight of a quaint, pretty little church standing by itself

in the middle of a green meadow"; "disturbed a quaint old man, another octogenarian, picturesque in a vast white beard"). He can be absurd in the worst whimsical, belle-lettristic way. Looking at a marigold, he effuses:

How the townsman, town born and bred, regards this flower, I do not know. . . . For me it has an atmosphere, a sense of suggestion of something immeasurably remote and very beautiful—an event, a place, a dream perhaps, which has left no distinct image, but only this feeling unlike all others, imperishable and not to be described except by the one word Marigold.

Unlike Richard Jefferies, a greater naturalist writer from Wiltshire, whose childhood memories seamlessly become his adult experience, Hudson was born and brought up in South America and did not come to England until his late twenties, in 1869. So there is a gap at the base of his English writing. He begins *A Shepherd's Life*: "I am unable to bring to mind an instance of a lover of Wiltshire who was not a native or a resident, or had not been to Marlborough and loved the country on account of early associations." Well, it was brought up in Wiltshire and went to Marlborough, and in the BBC's *Bread or Blood* I sometimes found it a relief to escape Hudson's authorial voice, forever comparing the downs to the pampas.

Indeed, with the magnificent camera work of the opening shots catching the desolation and the loneliness, the vast open rolling space of the downs, the white chalk trackways winding away into nothingness, I felt expected to hear the wailing call of the stone curlew. And the different time of the downs was captured too—the clear simplicity, the exhilarating disappearance of all the clutter of intervening history to leave nothing but the modern man and his Neolithic ancestor, in a landscape itself entirely formed of planktonic skeletons, filtered down to the beds of primeval seas.

And what a relief it was to discover that Peter Smith's film was tough,

disciplined, seriously attempting historical accuracy: that it actually possessed a strong plot and well defined characters. The first two scene-setting episodes, the cottage interiors lit by shot in colours that seem to have been taken straight from Van Gogh's *The Potato Pickers*, are unconvincingly slow. Isaac Bawcombe, the shepherd, owing as much to Gabriel Oak as to Hudson and brilliantly played by Malcolm Story, is Bible-reading, upright, thoroughly dependable, one of nature's upland gentlemen; his foil is the equally impressive, nasty revolutionary blacksmith, Ben Jarvis (equally well played by Ian Redford) enclosed by fire and sweat and metal in the village in the valley; a traditional division which stretches back as far as the coming of the smelter in the Iron Age, as far as Wayland's Smithy in folklore.

The community is seen at work, and poaching to supplement a poor diet which is otherwise only just above starvation level. Isaac's wife Mary (Carolyn Pickles, who has lucidly wandered in from an earlier BBC serialisation of *Tess*) gives birth to a boy delivered by Isaac himself with the practised expertise of countless lamblings after the mercantile gropings of a Dickensian midwife.

From 1816 to 1820 the film moves on to 1826, gathering speed and conviction. This is partly the unlikely result of the entry of Isaac's son, Caleb, played by Andrew Farrow, a genuine shepherd's son ten years old, and the best new television actor of the 1830s. Land is enclosed and work is effectively closed too; with common grazing and no wood gathering, starvation is a real possibility. And with no work for part of the year once the threatening machine arrives, it is almost a certainty.

A hapheazard, half-accidental, for the small and large tenor, failed very well done by John Cuthbert and George Malpas at last takes place. The country fairground celebration of this break in routine, and of the breaking of threshing machines, abruptly gives way to real fear as the landowner's armed Specials ride in to the farmyard. Conrad's "stupor" judges "mistaking a shadow for substance" deal out sentences of appalling severity. A sombre possession reminds us that in the Swing Riots, 1830, though not one hundred farmer or parson was seriously injured, nineteen labourers were hanged, 481 were transported, and 641 imprisoned. All in all, *Bread or Blood* is an outstanding achievement—and much better than most of Hudson.

almost everywhere but in this right place, such professionalism was awe-inspiring. It did, however, occasionally make it all seem too easy, and indeed, in a couple of instances, it appeared as if the printers were actually doing most of the hard work.

The book provides a useful summary of the programmes, filled out with short histories of the techniques and some waspish asides in the direction of dealers, museums and art historians. The commercial versions of each process are outlined and were seen briefly in action in the last programme. This considered the blurred distinction between original prints and reproductions, a confusion created by the introduction of photographic methods, and willfully exacerbated by some publishers. Phylips for signatures "has reached ludicrous proportions but can scarcely be condemned in a country so woefully lacking in art education as every level. At the exhibition mounted at the ICA, however, crowds came to see an artist demonstrate the different processes: each day, to ask questions and, for modest prices, to buy the prints on show.

A week's season of films made for television is being put on by the Riverside Studios, Hammersmith, from May 26. Each will be followed by discussions with writers, directors and producers involved. Among the films are: Sean Lynch's *Days of Hope* and David Hare's *Licking Hitler*.

## Picasso

"Why do you think I did this?"  
"I did it because I was a man."  
"I did it because I was a man."  
"I did it because I was a man."  
"I did it because I was a man."

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## commentary

### Types and characters

By Richard T. Godfrey

William Nicholson: Woodcuts and  
Lithographs  
Maclean Gallery

The Victorian public had to wait until the Diamond Jubilee year of 1897 before they could acquire a portrait of their queen that did justice to her appearance. William Nicholson's famous woodcut achieved enormous success on its publication by the *New Review*, and remains the most telling image of Victoria, with her massive certainty of pose, ample acreage of black costume, and shaggy dog in attendance. Familiar though it is, and the artist observed wryly that it "papered the world", its fresh and witty vision still makes it the centrepiece of an exhibition at the Maclean Gallery. This contains the great majority of prints from his published albums, including *An Alphabet*, *An Almanac of Twelve Sports*, *London Types*, *Twelve Portraits* and the colour lithographs of *Characters of Romance*. All are illustrated in Elizabeth Cayzer's informative and well researched catalogue (about 36 unnumbered pages with 103 plates) and most are from the de luxe woodcut editions published by Heinemann, embellished by hand colouring, which a crispness of contour that did not always survive their translation to lithography for the numerous popular editions.

Nicholson came to the medium of woodcut after his brief partnership with James Pryde (under the name 'The Regatta Brothers'), during which they produced a small number of highly influential posters. He was recommended to William Heinemann by Whistler, and in 1896 he signed a contract with him for *An Alphabet*,

finally published in 1898, in which each letter is illustrated by wonderfully succinct and characterful figures, typified by the sinuous silhouette of "V for Villain". The style of these, as of his succeeding designs in that decade, relies on bold simplification, with an absence of middle tones and an exceptionally precise aim in the placing of deep blocks of shadow or significant

detail. He was well aware of the visual tradition of the chapbooks which had been earlier revived and celebrated by Joseph Crawhall, but refined it by an arch sophistication of composition which was to be one of his legacies to his son Ben Nicholson.

This skill is evident in *London Types* in such figures as the gawky coster girl. And in response to Heinemann's request for more female figures, in-

cluding a barmaid "if a picture can possibly be made of the horrible-looking object in a black dress and white collar", he also produced in this album one of the noblest English prints, showing an erect figure abstractedly drying a glass.

Elizabeth Cayzer points out that Heinemann had initially been reluctant to publish the portrait of Queen Victoria, fearing that it might be thought *à la majesté*, but its success led to his commissioning a whole gallery of Victorians published in the *Twelve Portraits* of 1899. Monumental to a degree, they never resort to the exaggerated caricature of Nicholson's bosom companion, Max Beerbohm, but yet evince something of the latter's amused but slightly awed respect for such formidable human phenomena of the period as Gladstone, Kipling, Whistler, Lord Roberts and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Nicholson's enthusiasm for working in woodcut was characteristic of the 1890s in that it was effervescent but short-lived. He turned to colour lithography for the sixteen figures of *Characters of Romance* (1900), and in a rather self-conscious attempt to enlarge his character as an artist used profligate and mannered swirls of line to depict figures whose grotesque ugliness owes something to Dore's illustrations to *Rabelais*. They are uneasy confessions and were a commercial failure. Even less attractive, and surprisingly heavy handed, are the twenty-four lithographs of Oxford colleges published by the Stafford Gallery in 1905, which mysteriously endow the buildings with a sulphurous gloom reminiscent of *Salford*, or *Wigan*. However, Nicholson's history is not one of decline, for he matured quietly over a long career into the painter of cool and refined still-lives and portraits that are now receiving their proper due.



Nicholson's "Barmaid", specially commissioned by William Heinemann, from the exhibition reviewed here.

### Theatre of unsocial hours

By Harold Hobson

A great deal of fine theatre, and many performances that have in them grace, truth, humour or pathos—perhaps, that represent a considerable amount of thought and hard work—are never reviewed by the London national critics. This happens for no better reason than that these performances are given at what are professionally known as 'unsocial hours', like one o'clock in the afternoon, or six o'clock at night, even

though these hours are peculiarly convenient to the public, fitting in very well with luncheon or dinner. It was not so in the past, when a national critic was perfectly capable of giving four times as much space to a lunchtime performance of the then unknown William Trevor's first play as to the theoretically big theatrical event of the week. That sort of thing happens no longer. This affects not only the organizers of the small lunchtime programmes but also the great National Theatre itself, and it causes anxiety to both. I believe, for example, that the National's recent platform performance of *Aurora Leigh* was not reviewed by a single national critic, even though the heroine's part was taken by so celebrated an actress (her mere presence in the cast, announcing the play's value) as Felicity Kendal.

The same thing looks like happening with Nicholas Braithwaite's delicate and inventive production of Geraldine Aron's *Bar and Joe* in lunchtime performances at the Lyric Studio until May 9. Thirty-five important critics were invited to the first performance. Not a single one turned up. None of them turned up at the second performance either. Geraldine Aron is a particularly interesting dramatist, but how can the public be expected to see her work if those who are professionally paid to consider it refuse to look at it, like Mrs Whitehouse and *The Romans in Britain*?

Where is its publicity to come from? Miss Aron brings to the theatre a particularly heightened poignancy, the emotion of separation, especially the irreparable separation, accomplished by death. She did this in the case of a flickering husband and wife in a previous play, *A Gateway Girl*, and she heart-rendingly repeats it in *Bar and Joe*, who are the children of the

couple in the previous play.

Seated on a tiny sofa, Barrie and Gerlie (Barrie the somewhat younger of the two) grow up together, make fun of each other, and develop a mischievous and mutually protective friendship. Barrie is sarcastically superior about Gerlie's boyfriends, and Gerlie does not think much of Barrie's jokes. There is one particularly delightful episode in which Adam Norton as Barrie bounces up his knees like a small boy, buries his head in them, and then, choking with laughter till his shoulders shake, tells a funny story which fills him with childish joy, although the story has absolutely no point at all. But as he grows older Barrie gets a motor bike, and across all this happiness there comes the cry, "Barrie is dead". The grief of Gerlie (who is both brilliant and unbearable to watch, in the small compass of her face a world is instantly destroyed).

This experience is something not to be missed by theatregoers; and it will be missed simply through the neglect of our principal critics. Miss Udwin and Mr Norton will give their superb performances to audiences which ought to be ten times as large as they will be; they will have no record in their scrapbooks of fifty years hence to remind them how good they were, and what they accomplished, for twenty-odd performances at the Lyric Studio; a promising young dramatist will be overlooked and an admirable director go unpraised.

Happily, at the Lyric platform performance of *Aurora Leigh* which I attended there were four or five hundred people present. Felicity Kendal does not depend on critics to try to see everything. But it seems to me that a compromise might be reached. Everything done at the National has some point of interest, and therefore all their platform productions ought to be reviewed. And if a lunchtime performance is put on by a producer whose previous work suggests that it might be of value, then I depend on them to prevent the memory of her performance from disappearing into oblivion. No one has

attempted to put down into words, however inadequate, the rapturous, benign smile with which Aurora Leigh rejected Romney Leigh's proposals of marriage because she was determined to be an independent woman and earn her own living by writing. Mrs Browning's *Aurora Leigh* must have been one of the first feminist tracts, and Michelene Wandor's adaptation makes it very attractive and indeed persuasive. The gentle, discouraged proposals of marriage by Greg Filkins's Romney Leigh, his solicitude for Aurora's welfare, his kindness to his tenants and his bitter reaction to it, are likewise, so far as print is concerned, as forgotten as Miss Kendal's exquisite achievement in creating a woman who, without ostentation, displays the determination of an ambitious man, whilst preserving her own radiant charm.

But without Miss Kendal, or the crowd-drawing powers of a Peggy Ashcroft or a Harold Pinter (to whom the national critics pay their proper homage), the National's platform performances are scarcely more fortunate than those of the neglected lunchtime productions elsewhere. A week after *Aurora Leigh* I went to a platform performance given by two unnamed actors. There were only about twenty people there. Unless he has a genuine passion for the theatre, no critic will try to see everything. But it seems to me that a compromise might be reached. Everything done at the National has some point of interest, and therefore all their platform productions ought to be reviewed. And if a lunchtime performance is put on by a producer whose previous work suggests that it might be of value, then I depend on them to prevent the memory of her performance from disappearing into oblivion. No one has

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## Christopher Hope







# A prevalence of paronomasia

Robin Robbins

EDWARD LE COMTE:

A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry  
238pp. Macmillan. £15.  
0 353 30085 8

When Milton in Book VI of *Paradise Lost* describes Satan as "scorning in ambiguous words", the sardonic fiend has just perpetrated some dozen puns in a nine-line speech, displaying both braggadocio and duplicity. The poet's wordplay here is in as deadly earnest as the swordplay of the spirits, yet it is not perceived by him as by the bluffy embarrassed Lancelot to be simply "the first overt crime of the refractory angels". The still unfallen Adam sees sinful Eve as "Defaced, deflowered, and now to death devoted" — literally disfigured, deprived of her garden, and given over to death, but at the same time discountenanced, robbed of moral beauty, violated, and doomed by God's vow. Because the narrator himself, working from an exegetical tradition that wrung every drop of meaning from every word of the Bible, respects what Sir Thomas Browne called "the deuterocopy, and second intention of the words", he too, in *propria persona* packs his language with metaphor and allusion. In "Adam, earth's hallowed mould", the etymology of the name, "red" as the dust from which he was formed, is evoked by the juxtaposition of "earth's", "hallowed", both bears its primary meaning of "consecrated", and echoes the near homophone "hollowed", i.e. "shaped", while "mould" expresses both the original substance and the divinely imparted form.

Though such grave paronomasia differs much in tone from that of the young Milton in his two poems "On the University Carrier" whose fifty-two lines contain almost that number of plays on words, it is obvious from the highly useful index to Edward Le Comte's *Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English Poetry* that the poet's appreciation and use of multiple meanings developed continuously throughout his career. He achieved this richness not simply by grafting on Biblical and classical associations, but by employing the many layers of the English words had accumulated over the quarter millennium since Chaucer's time. Le Comte here collects and arranges alphabetically the in- of "Eve", i.e. "treacherous", "pleasant", stances detected by critics and com-

mentators from Patrick Hume in the seventeenth century down to 1980, adding several hundred contributions of his own.

The examples given above may have prompted the suspicion that the term "pun" is inadequate to cover Milton's extensive grammatical and syntactical ambivalences. In Le Comte's introduction — indispensable precautionary reading for every user of the book — he distinguishes (pace Empson's quite different classification) seven types of what may be more fully termed ambiguity in Milton. The first is the most obvious, verbal kind, for example "small infantry". The second, even commoner and better known, is etymological, often achieved by glossing noun or name by an epithet, as in "Immortal amarant", "universal Pan". Alternatively, a foreign word may be applied with both its usual figurative meaning and an original literal denotation, as when Raphael is termed "illustrious guest".

Le Comte's remaining five categories are less easily recognizable as "puns". His third contains "secondary meanings that Milton presumably did not intend, but that are felt to be there". It seems little more than prudent to admit the subject-matter of modern inference that by "aspersion" Adam (before the Fall) alludes to premature ejaculation; that even the gulfed tempter, comparing the apples "smell to 'leaves of eve'" means "you", i.e. Eve; or that the "gums of glutinous heat" on the Lady's chair in *Comus* are "sperm", or refer to the Latin *glutinosus*, buttock. It is no scholarly compulsion which drives Le Comte to suggest that "the lascivious lap of a deceitful concubine" drained Samson's strength orally, that "fallacious looks" "induce a phallus", and that when "The secrets of the hoary deep" are revealed to Sin and Satan Milton had in mind (since Chaos is "the womb of nature") "female (whore) parts". In this critical *Playbook* Club are many members: J. J. M. Tobin wants Samson's "steers-mate" to be (despite the nautical context) "the spouse of a castrated animal", like his "restless thoughts" "like a deadly swarm of hornets armed" to be "whore-nets". When Satan proposes to "confound the race Of mankinds in one root" he is for employing the many layers of the English words had accumulated over the quarter millennium since Chaucer's time. Le Comte here collects and arranges alphabetically the in- of "Eve", i.e. "treacherous", "pleasant", stances detected by critics and com-

The half-dismissive, half-defensive jocularity of the introduction — "Mulder's observation of 'pit-tie' is almost too good to be true" — betrays an unwillingness to keep to the indubitably worthy purpose of the book, which is to elucidate the ambivalences of Milton, not the preoccupations of his readers. Nor is it merely that such playing to the gallery is out of place and undignified: the prefixing of warning asterisks (they would more fitly have been obelisks) to these "most provocative and doubtful" conjectures will not suffice to preclude the encouragement of crude solipsism and the misleading of innocent students into thinking that this is the way to read Milton.

Similar objection may be made to Le Comte's fourth category, comprising interpretative cruces, where likewise no ambiguity was necessarily intended by Milton. Le Comte conceives it to be his duty to "include whatever conjectures have found their way into print, regardless of how far-fetched a regard to them may seem". Regrettably, he gives no indication (apart from sporadic asterisks) of his own educated preferences. Of ten interpretations of "Uranian", for example, at least four are compatible among themselves, and three, the individual persons of the Trinity, are clearly incompatible, yet all are listed randomly. Likewise Le Comte's long involvement with the much pondered "haemony", "hycathine", and "two-handed engine" qualifies him to give more guidance than he does to less erudite readers. Sometimes his scholarship stops surprisingly short in the listing not just of improbable but of acceptable and possible readings; the curfew's "sullen roar" in *Il Penseroso* need not be either "dull, heavy" or "solemn": the *OED* suggests also, among

more jarring senses, "melancholy" or "mournful".

Le Comte's fifth category of "pun" does not generate ambiguity, or constitute a large part of his dictionary; comprising as it does mere "jingles of the 'beseeching or besieging' type (this one a piece of contemptuous rhetoric by Satan). The sixth category contains textual cruces, under which, like modern editors, Le Comte admits, for example, Bentley's more plausible emendations, such as "swelling gourd" for "smelling gourd", besides less necessary changes like Maasson's "off" for "of" in *Paradise Regained*, IV, 32.

Syntactical ambiguity fills Le Comte's seventh category. It is, as he observes, "an outstanding trait of Milton's loose and floating style", exemplified in "her hand Soft she withdrew". "A fairer person lost not heaven" or "And justify the ways of God to men". Here again, the giving of what must be seen — from wider contexts than those provided — as misinterpretations will mislead rather than enlighten some readers. In "learn how their greatest monuments of fame, And strength and art are easily outdone", Tillyard's taking of "strength and art" as genitives, parallel to "fame", is all the reader needs; to point out that they might be in the nominative merely troubles waters for the wrong-headed to fish in. The same may be said of such insupportable whimsicalities as Broadbent's "Eyeless", "I less", Mulder's "unchanged to hoarse", "without number" did not make music", and Tobin's "upbraided" reader bald by lifting up words of hair". The cumulative effect is to induce distrust of certain names in the Milton business, and to prefer

by contrast established firms such as Verity, Ricks, and Fowler.

This is not to say that Le Comte's pursuit is pointless: indeed, some of his chosen words could be explained further. On "sin and her shadow Death" he misses the Platonic and Horatian sense of *umbra* as an uninvited guest, a voracious hanger-on of the one who is invited, in this case of sin voluntarily committed. There is also an unconscious (perhaps impossible) line drawn between secondary (but still desirable) meanings, which fall within the purview of the work, and associative connotations, which do not. In discussing the "resonances of Samson's 'Out, out, Hyena!'" it is far less fruitful to record Tobin's probably over-pedantic note of the Greek etymology of "swine, therefore reiteration of Dalia as 'wild-an'", than to recall, as does Fowler, the animal's traditional reputation as one that disintegrated and fed on the all intents and purposes dead Samson, and as a beast which lured men to destruction with a deceiving voice and was usually unreliable, changing from year to year (not to mention being noted for its mocking laughter).

This book might have been even more useful than it is undoubtedly had the items of Le Comte's appendixes been grouped or at least marked as such. A more appropriate title and some reduction of its uncritical inclusiveness would have made it less provocative and more to the point, yet just as truly stimulating. Thus reformed it would have displayed Le Comte's undoubted powers as critic and scholar supported by what are often other people's idiocies, admitted by him. Against his better knowledge, he deceived, but fondly overcome.

## All Spenserians together

By Jean Wilson

PATRICK CULLEN and THOMAS P. ROCHE Jr (Editors):

Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual.  
200pp. University of Pittsburgh Press.  
\$14.50  
0 8229 3408 6

The final academic accolade for a distinguished author is elevation from the status of subject of a newsletter to that of subject of a journal. Edmund Spenser, the raw material for the past decade and more, of a massive academic industry, has now achieved this. The University of Pittsburgh Press, the people who brought you *Milton Studies*, have decided to follow it up with *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual*.

Its auspices are decidedly favourable. The choice of editors is good — Thomas P. Roche Jr (editor of the Penguin *Poetry* *Quarterly*) and Patrick Cullen — and the editorial board, from Alpers to Whitaker, comprises the almost all the most important modern Spenserians. One's only reservation is wonder at such a comprehensive editorial involvement who will be available actually to subscribe to the journal, let alone write for it.

The contents of this first volume are encouraging. Nine essays, some contemporary, with a retroactive amount of attention given to the minor works as opposed to the *Poems*, provide a substantial contribution to Spenserian literature. They range from the adequate to the excellent; not a dud in sight. Carl F. Kasmussen opens with a very interesting essay on the "Theatricality of *Spenser's* *Prothelaion*", a position, an approach, which has been "bearing" for some time. The *Spenser Studies* and *The Poems* statement, it is undoubtedly the best.

Queen's Book I, and which serves to emphasize how all-of-a-piece Spenser's poetical career was, even in this early school-work. Ruth Samson Luborsky approaches *The Shepheardes Calender* as a physical object, setting the book in the context of contemporary printing conventions, both English and Continental, and deducing from unusual elements in its appearance a range of allusions to Marot, the newly-edited Virgil, the calendar/almanna, the fable book, the manuscript and early printed book, and the annotated emment book. The approach is new, valid and interesting, and unaffected by the dreadful ramble she gets into over Quartos 2-5 of *The Shepheardes Calender* and the caption of Figure 2 as the title page of the Quarto printed by Thomas Arden, when it is visibly that printed by John Wolfe. It is unfortunate that her style and mode of argument tend to complicate her already complex discussion.

Bruce R. Smith's complementary essay is probably the best in the book. It relates *The Shepheardes Calender* to three distinct literary genres: classical eclogue, medieval moral almanac, and Renaissance pastoral romance, and shows how the reader must work through the conflicting demands of these genres to achieve a balanced and complete response to the poem. The last contribution to *The Shepheardes Calender*, by Judith M. Kennedy's examination of the "final emblem 'Mere non morere'", in which she explores its range of implications and its application to the poem. This is not the most exciting or entertaining essay in the book but it may well be the most soundly scholarly.

After Alexander Duntlop's synthesis of "traditional" and "modernist" approaches to *Amoretti*, leading it as based on a religious framework and focusing on the psychology of the lover as poet-dramatist, there follow three essays on *The Faerie Queene*. Of these the first, Hugh MacLachlan's examination of the first eight Cantos of Book II as a study in revenge and statement, is undoubtedly the best.

## LITERATURE

# Incorporations into realism

By David Seed

ROBERT EMMET LONG:  
*The Great Succession: Henry James and the Legacy of Hawthorne*  
203pp. University of Pittsburgh Press  
\$12.95  
0 8229 3398 5

The question of Hawthorne's influence on Henry James has a long and honourable history in James criticism, dating back at least to T. S. Eliot's famous article of 1918, "The Hawthorne Aspect". Nevertheless, Robert Emmet Long's study is the first book to devote itself entirely to this topic and as such it fills a gap in accounts of how James started his career as a writer. Long argues that an early, naïvely imitative influence can be seen in the stories of the later 1860s and 1870s (in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" or "De Gray", for instance) where James is making excursions into the Gothic or into Romance; and he demonstrates interestingly that "Benvenuto" (1875), which is usually taken as a parable of the artist's choice between solitude and society, specifically allegorizes James's own choice between America and Europe. The contrast between the socialities of each culture (the socializations of each culture) looks forward to James's criticism in his full-length study of Hawthorne.

Long narrows down Hawthorne's influence to three main texts. The first of these, "Rappaccini's Daughter", which revolves around a father's exploitation of his daughter in the course of pursuing supposedly ideal ends reappears in James's presentation of Dr Sloper in *Washington Square* and of Osmond's attitude towards Pansy in *The Portrait of a Lady*. The second text, *The Marble Faun*, plays its part in moulding Roderick Hudson's "fall" from artistic purity and in the latter sections of *The Portrait*, although Long is never so crude as to suggest direct mimicry. Thus he makes an important distinction be-

tween Hawthorne's atmosphere evocation of evil in *The Marble Faun* and James's precise notation of social manners in *Roderick Hudson*. The influence in question consists of broad shapes being given to certain themes, or of the incorporation of romantic or melodramatic perspectives (such as Isabel Archer's sense of horror at her marital situation) within the broad realism of these novels.

One of the most original and rewarding chapters of Long's book shows how W. D. Howells channelled Hawthorne into James's fiction. *The Undiscovered Country* (1880) takes up the subject of Spiritualism from *The Blithedale Romance* (Long's third text), modifies it into a romance novel, James takes up the same subject in *The Bostonians* and modifies it yet again into a novel of manners. The influence of Hawthorne on James is thus a series of transformations or incorporations into realism. Long sections on *The Bostonians* are not only interesting for shedding new light on that novel but also for demonstrating the important part played by Howells in shaping James's career, probably the most neglected of possible influences. James himself acknowledged his debt when in 1912 he wrote to Howells and declared, "You showed me the way and opened the door".

Obviously a key text in this study is James's *Hawthorne*, which appeared in the English Men of Letters series in 1879. Long's chapter on this work is one of the richest in the book since he touches on so many topics. He points out, for instance, that Taine's theories of the environment were exerting an important pressure on James; that James underestimated the tragic side of Hawthorne partly because he disliked George Parsons Lathrop's *Study of Hawthorne* (one of his sources) so much; and argues ingeniously that James had a strong animus against New England because he could imagine so easily how he would have reacted in Hawthorne's position. Long is absolutely right in saying that *Hawthorne* is a deeply divided work.

Richard Poirier has pointed out the strange disparity between the impersonal historical terms which James uses and the personal anxiety of tone. James is clearly using his subject to insist on his own cosmopolitanism, perhaps in reaction to the charge made against him in 1878 by George Saintsbury, that in his criticism he was "wont to speak with all the sternness of New England". Apart from being a leading member of the Victorian critical establishment, Saintsbury was also a contributor to the English Men of Letters series, and his accusation of James uses and the personal anxiety of tone. James is clearly using his subject to insist on his own cosmopolitanism, perhaps in reaction to the charge made against him in 1878 by George Saintsbury, that in his criticism he was "wont to speak with all the sternness of New England". 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